

Improve managerial skill through brain synchronization techniques!

Whole Brain Thinking and the Nurse Manager

by **DIANE CULVER VEEHOFF**

Synchronizing the distinctive ways your brain functions won't guarantee you'll be the perfect nurse manager, but it can greatly increase your likelihood of success. Based on Nobel Laureate Roger Sperry's split brain research, synchronization techniques offer a proven means for improving managerial ability and skill.

Two thinking styles

You didn't inherit your rank and ability as a nurse manager. You earned it and learned it. Since the demand for your skill and ability is increasing dramatically, brain synchronization gives you that needed "extra edge." By utilizing both cerebral hemispheres, you access information from "two brains" instead of one, and intelligent, inspired performance can be the outcome.

Historically, society has emphasized the importance of the left brain at the right's expense. This prejudice is changing, albeit slowly, as research proves that neither hemisphere is superior. Scientists are just beginning to understand

and appreciate the brain's two distinct cognitive styles. In 1913, Jasper Corey reported that we possess two separate brains, each capable of independent thought. Brocca's discovery of the language center in the left hemisphere implied it was superior to the right one.

Psychobiologist Sperry found that each cerebral hemisphere has its own

Right and left brain styles of thinking and communicating are different but equally important.

memory, its own train of consciousness, its own "personality." Although their styles of thinking and communicating differs, they are probably equally important.

The left brain is unemotional, logical, rational and detail oriented. It processes information with an analytical, time-dependent, sequential strategy using language as its means of communication. The right hemisphere is emotional, intuitive, creative, and relationship-oriented. It processes information within a

EXHIBIT I

CHARACTERISTICS OF "LEFT BRAIN" THINKER

- Accurate, organized, orderly, careful
- Planner/detail-oriented
- Rational, sequential analysis
- Judge, decision-maker
- Likes facts, figures, dates, "hard core data"
- Enjoys logical thinking, step-by-step instructions
- Stimulated by taking ideas apart
- Expresses thoughts verbally
- Evaluates critically
- Steady, detached, non-emotional
- Likes routines, rules, structure and schedules

CHARACTERISTICS OF "RIGHT BRAIN" THINKER

- Holistic mentation; grasps "big picture" quickly
- Deep spiritual foundation
- Exhibits intuition, inspiration, invention, imagination
- Action-oriented, physical
- Spontaneous, playful, humorous
- Sees patterns in events; leads to "breakthrough" thinking
- Craves excitement, variety, change and challenge
- Feelings produce energy and excitement
- Appreciates sweeping terms, rhyming, metaphors, symbolic language
- Relationship-oriented, receptive

holistic framework, independent of logic and order, using pictures to think and communicate. (See Exhibit I.) Integrated thinking activates more of the brain's capacity to organize creative, practical solutions to everyday departmental dilemmas. Managing the many risks and problems which accompany patient situations calls for both left-brain and right-brain capacities to solve their complications.

Effect on patient care

Since each hemisphere approaches tasks, people, and situations from its own frame of reference, familiarity with staff members' thinking styles helps nurse managers take advantage of their natural abilities and preferences. Thus, they can assign tasks which:

- Utilize each person's natural expertise
- Amplify skills
- Challenge and stimulate
- Pair ability with job requirements

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ACCESSING THE LEFT AND RIGHT HEMISPHERES

LEFT

Writing: Words foster clear and effective left-brain thinking

Sorting thoughts: outlining ideas in a logical sequence after classifying like thoughts into groups

Computer use: input requires exact sequential ordered data which stimulates the left hemisphere

Stimulate left brain by note taking: analyzing body language, tone of voice; organizing; prioritizing; writing; outlining; controlling the environment

RIGHT

Brainstorming: allows thinking to flow, free of critique

Relaxation techniques: relaxation produces alpha brain waves which access the right brain

Music: slow rhythmic musical pattern produces alpha brain waves, creating an internal cerebral atmosphere that allows for easy entry to "lateral thinking"

Functions that activate right brain: visualizing; daydreaming; *responding* to body language, tone of voice; hugging; smiling; laughing; allowing events to happen; drawing; doodling; printing

EXHIBIT III

SYNCHRONIZATION TECHNIQUES

Synchronous flashing lights: Photodrive and synchronize both hemispheres of the brain by stimulating various brain wave frequencies. (Write to 21st Century Holdings, Inc., Sanlando Center Office Park, Suite 200, 2170 W. SR 434, Longwood, FL 32779).

Synchronous sounds: Certain sound patterns create a Frequency Following Response in the electrical activity of the brain which lead the hemispheres to work together simultaneously. (Direct inquiries to: Robert Monroe, Monroe Institute, Route 1, Box 175, Faver, VA 22938).

Biogenics®: Psychophysiological techniques that move body and mind toward a state of biochemical and electrical balance. (Write to C. Norman Shealy, Shealy Institute, 1328 E. Evergreen, Springfield, MO 65803).

Open Focus: Emphasizes brain wave synchrony through attention training, utilizing electroencephalograph biofeedback. (Write to Lester Fehmi, Princeton Behavioral Medicine, 317 Mount Lucas Road, Princeton, NJ 08540).

Thinking style influences one's perceptions of people, events, experience, what is viewed as important and how one relates to others. For example, one patient might need a caretaker who is very understanding, takes time to listen and values highly the relationship of the interaction (right brain). Another patient might prefer a very forthright manner with methodical interventions based

on logical explanations (left brain).

Pairing the caretaker's natural skills with the patient's preference creates a healthy match which fosters the healing process instead of impeding it. Improving patient comfort and well-being speeds recovery and consequently saves money for the hospital. This approach also promotes staff retention.

The key to managerial success is learning how and when to access the right and/or left hemisphere. (See Exhibit II.) Though simultaneous right and left hemispheric thought is continuously taking place, material from the preferred hemisphere often predominates. Edward DeBono of Cambridge University found that thought flows through established patterns. Each repetition of thought flow strengthens that marking in the cerebral cortex. This habituates thought flow in a particular sequence and perpetuates the feedback loop of overutilization of just one hemisphere. Albert Einstein mastered the whole-brain experience early in his career. His success was due, not to the size of his brain, but to his ability to utilize both hemispheres.

In similar fashion, nurse managers can assure their success by:

1. understanding hemispheric functions
2. acknowledging one's hemispheric preference
3. appreciating hemispheric differences as equal
4. accessing information from both hemispheres

5. integrating bilateral hemispheric information

A difficulty arises when a person values one hemisphere's function over the other because the right and left sides have different capabilities, designed for specific purposes. The idea that we have only a rational brain seriously restricts our diverse abilities and limits performance.

Brain synchronization is a concurrent rhythmic integration of the left and right hemispheres' electrical rhythm and activity. Sperry believes the subjective whole-brain experience is more than and different from that of the two separate hemispheres. Exhibit III lists techniques for achieving synchronization.

Learning to utilize left- and right-brain thinking styles, along with activating brain synchronization techniques, develops the innate ability to focus attention. Solutions to problems and questions become clear and easier to implement. Developing the ability to change mental functioning enhances the nurse manager's performance in interpersonal relations.

Greater understanding of the uses of focused consciousness can be achieved through educational and research efforts. Nurses have an opportunity for themselves and a responsibility to their profession and patients to participate individually and collectively in finding out more about this new frontier.

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